LIGAYA VICTORIO FRUTO

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Ligaya Fruto, born and educated in the Philippine Islands, describes her family life and education in the Manila suburb of Caloocan. She tells of her brief teaching career, her early writing, her impetuous marriage to newspaperman Ramon V. Reyes and the tragedy of World War II.

Mrs. Fruto's journalistic activities in behalf of the guerillas, the murder of her husband, her survival and that of her young son are recounted. After the war, Mrs. Fruto moved to Hawaii, where she became involved in numerous activities in the Filipino community and later joined the staff of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin.

She shares her views on the excesses of the Marcos regime, her confidence in the Aquino administration, her concern for the future of her native land and her continuing efforts to assist in its rehabilitation.

Along with other awards, Mrs. Fruto is included in the Jose Garcia Villa Roll of Honor of Short Stories for the period 1926-1940.

INTERVIEW WITH LIGAYA VICTORIO FRUTO

(MRS. LORENZO C. FRUTO)

At her home 3598 Alani Drive, Honolulu, Hawaii

March 12, 1986

F: Ligaya Victorio Fruto

S: Alice Sinesky, Interviewer

S: I realize from what I've read how you interpret things, and how you express yourself. If you would like to take that same vein, and talk a little bit about your childhood, about what was important to you, the things you remember.

F: Well, as I said in one of my stories, I never even knew whether we were rich or poor. We had this very big house with three bedrooms; the parents in one room with the baby, the girls in one room, the boys in another. Just to show you the kind of upbringing I had, my father was the type who could not stand his daughters having suitors. In those days girls got courted, you know. I was the second girl, so while there was a big gap between my older sister and myself, I had to be there because you can't allow one girl to sit there by herself. My mother had to be sitting someplace chaperoning, while we sat at least six or eight feet from each other. I don't know how you can talk in whispers. (laughs) And we never did. We just were raised that way.

It didn't matter whether we had servants or not. We had to know how to cook, how to do the laundry, how to do housekeeping. My mother was a very strange woman in a sense. She was ahead of her time. The three oldest daughters--she had five, you know--had to learn how to run a household. One summer my sister had to do everything--she had to do the marketing, she had to do the budgeting, she had command of everyone under her. Then another year, I was the one in charge. I had to take care of the marketing and all the other. We had to learn how to do the laundry.

S: But would the sisters help each other out? One was in charge?

F: Yes, you had to assign those things, but one was in charge. But the sisters were very tight; they were right there. We were not allowed to go one at a time, always we

were in a group. I never really understood even when I first got married--I got married when I was pretty young--my first marriage--I didn't know what it was to bake by myself. Because I came from this family where my father--we had this big room--the three oldest daughters always in each bed--the windows not only had locks, but he would put nails in the end of each, so that we could not peek. (laughs) I tell you--this was the way he was. This surprised us. Because he was a very gentle man when we were growing up, very gentle with us. He never could spank.

S: But very strict and very protective.

F: Yes, when we grew up, he became very, very protective. In my day there were serenades and so forth. We were never allowed to even look out the window. In the first place, you couldn't see very much, (laughs) when you only had this much for air. These were big, big windows made of shells. So my father would turn on the living room light, look out the window and say, "You men are allowed to visit my daughters from eight to nine--not at three o'clock in the morning." They would slink out, very embarrassed. He didn't even know who had done the serenading.

S: And with all these eligible daughters...

F: We grew up--my parents, my grandparents--in this town just north of Manila.

S: What town was this?

F: Caloocan. It's separated from the main city of Manila by just a bridge. This is the nice part of Metro Manila--just north of Manila proper. And we did everything in Manila. That's where we went to school, where we went shopping, where we went to the movies. You couldn't go to the movies with just a man.

I remember one time I got separated from a group of us schoolgirls--we had a break and we went to a movie. Filipinos are great moviegoers--they line up at seven o'clock in the morning--I've seen it happen. But we had gone there during a break in school--it was in the afternoon--and I got separated from my friends. I was just talking to this man and an auntie of mine, who had gone to the movie, came to me and said, "When did you get married?" Simply because I was talking to a man by myself. (laughs) This is unbelievable now when you think of some of the...but still in the provinces, I think this is happening.

S: Well, how did you manage to get married then? Was this an arranged marriage?

F: No, it was more a rebellious gesture. (laughs) You see, I was one of those people who always seemed to end up getting honors in school, and this was an embarrassment because I never studied anything. I was always being promoted to these classes and I would cling to the posts and I wouldn't go. I didn't want to leave my classmates. One time, when I got promoted from fifth to sixth grade, I cried so hard because I didn't want to leave.

Even in high school because I really believed that I got honors--I think I was third in my high school in graduation, because I was second youngest. The youngest one was valedictorian. We both graduated in short socks, you know.

S: Were these Catholic schools or public schools?

F: No, no. These were private schools. We could not qualify for public schools, because at that time we belonged to a province, the capital of which was very, very far away from our place, so we had to go to Manila. I could not qualify for a public school because we were not in the city. We were in this town next to Manila and my father had some kind of grudge against the Catholic Church at that time, which was why I could not go to the convent. This was why I was named Ligaya, which is a Filipina name. I am the only one in my family with a Filipina name. The others have Spanish names--Natividad, Estrella and so on. I am Ligaya. My father quarreled with the parish priest, so I had to be baptized in an independent church. (laughs)

S: So your father started you off on this track, only he didn't know it?

F: Yes, yes. He was the one that made me strange, I think. But when it was time for first communion, my mother took over--I had to be re-baptized. By then I was in grade one or grade two and I couldn't change my name anymore. Besides, I couldn't remember my Catholic name. So even when I got married here, the priest said, "We might just as well use your name now, because nobody would know you by your Catholic name."

We went to the Far Eastern College, which was a private school. It was still a small college at that time. Now it is probably one of the two biggest universities in the Philippines, because it is now Far Eastern University. At that time they had a lot of time for students because it wasn't very large. And as I say, I was very embarrassed when I was named an honor graduate because I never even studied. I had the most interesting instructors--especially a couple of them. They were educated in the United States.

Here I was, probably twelve or thirteen, and there were days, several times a week, when the English literature

teacher would come and call me and say, "Here's the key to my library. Go to my wife and say that I told you to read." And I would be reading for two or three hours. This you won't believe--a girl of about thirteen--I read Tolstoy, Chekhov, de Maupassant--all these people. I didn't really understand very much about what I was reading, but I enjoyed the way they wrote.

S: Unknown to your father, I bet.

F: Of course not. Well, he respected reading very much. He respected literature. He was very proud of the fact that I could write, eventually. But this was to me very, very strange because why should he (the teacher) send me all the time, instead of keeping me in class to learn the rudiments of writing and so forth?

Then when I went home, I had these dime novels (laughs) and I read those. My father's main punishment for me would be to hide those. Because I read, read, read, he said I was going to spoil my eyesight. But it never bothered me. I liked to read. I would go into a classroom and, before you know it, I read every book in the classroom. I just enjoyed reading so much. And yet I enjoyed playing also.

S: Well, you said you didn't study, but obviously you absorbed what was going on around you like a sponge.

F: I passed algebra and geometry and made very good grades. I mean it is a kind of passage. I learned about the isoceles triangle or something for the moment and then forgot about it. What do I need to learn about that? I mean, I don't retain that. What I retained would be the things I read like The Steppe by Chekhov--the ones I really enjoyed--some of the Bible stories that were transformed into literary reading--I enjoyed those things. Some of the international things that were translated.

S: What language were you reading everything in?

F: In English. I would come home sometimes and read in Tagalog--my mother's Tagalog magazines. In fact, when I was grown-up and already working as a writer, one of my colleagues taunted me and said, "You people--you English writing people--you cannot write in your own language." I said, "What will you bet?" He said, "You cannot." So I asked, "Why not?" I wrote a short story in Tagalog, which was our native language. He would not believe it. He published it--a beautiful publication--with a little note saying, "Ligaya Reyes said that she wrote this. We don't believe it. It is in the Tagalog. But she said to us, 'You're not going to help me. You're going to leave me to sink or swim.' She will try to swim. And here it is." He could not believe that it was written in what, he said, was

the most beautiful Tagalog he had published. He said, "How did you do it?" I said, "It's very simple. All you have to do is think in English and translate into Tagalog." (laughs)

Just to prove to him that I could do it, I did it again. I had two stories--they all disappeared. I told you I have no prize for posterity or anything. Many of those things were destroyed by the war. I didn't even see them.

But my father was very, very proud of the fact that I wrote. When I was graduating from high school, we had all these parties with the teachers, and this teacher of mine, who always made me read, would throw this Sunday supplement in front of me and say, "Look at that, Ligaya, you can write better than that." I said, "I'm not going to write until I'm forty years old. By then I will be very mature and I can write something." The next thing I knew, before I was out of my teens, I was writing. (laughs) This is unbelievable because I only wrote...I wanted to do something for my brother.

You see, when I was teaching, every thing that happened to me was like a freak accident or something. I was just going to a movie with friends who were going to take exams--entrance exams at the Philippine Normal School--Teachers College. Well, I was in the short dress and very simple and so on. And I thought, "Well, why not? I'll take this thing also." I got better grades than they did. I enrolled and I thought my father was going to have a stroke, because he had high hopes for me. I was to go to the university, finish there, go to the United States and get graduate courses, and go back there and be important.

"Well," I said, "I am pretty young. After I finish this, I can go on to these." But you see, when you go to Normal College, you are supposed to teach for two years before you can enter another university or do anything else, because this is a government thing. So I had to teach for two years.

My first assignment was as a grade one teacher, because they said I was so young. All right. I couldn't stand the children. Nobody paid any attention to me. (laughs) They thought I was a playmate. So when this letter came offering a job in the mountain province, you know, hours and hours and hours away from my home--I didn't even realize it was a Normal School. I showed up at the Board of Education and I was sitting there and nobody was paying any attention, so I finally showed them the letter offering me the job and they said, "But, my dear, we thought you were an experienced teacher already. We didn't know you were a kid." (laughs) The same thing happened to me when I reported to work there. I was sitting there, swinging my legs and the school

superintendent wasn't paying any attention to me. She thought I was a late high school comer.

They said, "You're late. Don't you realize you're late?" "I know," I said, as I presented to her my appointment. "My God," she said, "how old are you anyway?" She was so shocked when I was in my teens.

S: They just couldn't take you seriously.

F: They just couldn't understand. But it didn't matter at all to me. It was a new experience. The only thing that mattered to me was that here I was. I wanted to get that job to get away from the family, and they came with me. My mother and all my younger brothers and sisters came with me.

S: When you went teaching off in the mountains?

F: This is in Baguio City. It's a summer resort in the Philippines. Beautiful pine trees and everything. I never even cashed one paycheck. I gave it to my mother and she would give me four pesos for candies and magazines. (laughs) I tell you--I'm a freak. Then I would go every time in the morning--I would take this cold, cold shower--it's a very cold place--it's really temperate, you know, it's not like this--it's even colder. Even in the summer, it's colder than this has ever been cold.

I would run up the hill with my two braids swinging like that, and these high school kids who are in the separate high school--because I was in the Normal College--would say, "That's a well-dressed seventh grader." (laughs) Then I would get up there and the principal would say, "You know, Miss Victorio, you would look older if you would just put your hair up a little bit." I always had pins, so that when I got up the hill I'd put my braids up. And before I left, I let them down again.

I had two years of that and they wanted to keep me there and I said, "No." Because the year before--the second year--my mother decided that she could leave me safely because we were boarding. We had the apartment below the wife of the district engineer. She had ten children. Since there were about five or six of us downstairs they all went back, and I was left with the ten children because she felt it was safe, you know, because I was speaking with them all the time. Their father was with this Igorot place and they would talk about all the strange stories that happened in the Igorot community and one of them somehow captured my imagination.

It was just timely because my brother had just written to me asking me for money. I didn't know how to send him money, since I was sending all my money to my parents. So I decided, "Well, perhaps if I wrote, I could make some money."

I wrote this thing in longhand, sent it to my girlfriend, who was actuallly like my critic when I was in the Normal School where, by the way, my dissertation paper was one of the two exhibited, to my great amazement again. I tell you, all of this comes as a great surprise to me because I never understood how they could think that my writing was good or anything. I can't tell what's a good story or not. If I find I like my own story, I feel ashamed or embarrassed. I just didn't know.

So I wrote this thing. My gosh, you should have seen it. It was one of those very passionate things. It was based on what had captured the imagination of these little kids. About an Igorot woman who fell in love with a man from the lowlands, a Christian, and when he was going to leave her, she burned the house with the two of them inside. Well, that made for my first story and you should have seen it in the magazine. I tell you I was so embarrassed. I felt so ashamed. How could it be?

I had kept this story where nobody would find it. Because when I saw it typewritten...my friend had sent me a copy. She said, "I am going to send this to one of the magazines abroad. They might me able to use it." I said, "Are you crazy? Why would you do that?" I took my copy and I put it--I will never forget the book--I thought nobody else would open it because it was a huge book--and it is called American Wit and Humor (laughs) and I thought, "Whoever would look for anything as stupid as that in a book like that?", and my brother found it and sent it to the newspaper and the next thing you know I was getting a check and a rave letter from the literary editor. And I was a writer. It was so funny. I just didn't know how it happened.

I taught for two years and came back. But the last summer in Baguio I found out what it was to be free, you know. Of course I had the chaperones, but I was going to graduate classes in English and Spanish literature and there were all kinds of activities--dances and so forth. I don't understand how this happened because when I looked in the mirror, I would say, "This is crazy--it cannot be," but I would have callers from eight o'clock in the morning until almost midnight with roses, with this, that and the other thing. I don't know--probably friends because they couldn't say anything to me because I always had a chaperone. And nobody would dare touch my hand except in dancing.

The next thing I knew my landlady was posting a note--this was not the landlady that I usually stayed with because during the summer she and the children would join the husband in the mountains--so there I was, and the landlady posted visiting hours. I was more relieved than anything. I just couldn't cope with all these men stopping by. (laughs) I was running out of topics to talk about.

S: Were you teaching and taking graduate classes at the same time? Or was it in the summer that you were taking the classes?

F: It was in the summer. I was not going to teach anymore. I was just taking these preparatory to going back to the university. But they didn't want me to leave. The school principal--the superintendent--a supervisor from Manila from the Board of Education had come to where I was staying asking me to stay. I felt very flattered but I said, "No. I want to go back home." I missed my family. We were very close, you see. But by then, I had tasted what it was like to be free--to have a chance to go out and enjoy yourself. Not necessarily having boyfriends, because it was not allowed.

S: Just the social part of it--something different.

F: It made it so different for me that I could go with a chaperone all the time. I could walk around without my father glowering at me. He became even worse when I came back, so I suddenly just decided, "Why don't I elope?" Whoever was there I eloped with. And in the middle of the journey, I cried. I wanted to go home. I wanted to go back, but there was no bus going back. I had to sleep with his cousin, but I could not go back anymore because my father would be very, very unhappy. I wouldn't say he would kill me, but he would probably never forgive me. So I had to marry this man, who happened by my good fortune to be a very good man. Very gentle, very kind. So I married him.

I didn't know what it was to get married. I didn't know what happened when you got married. I didn't know anything about sex. My mother never spoke about sex. When I was teaching, the teachers were all older than I was, so they just looked at me as a child and they never talked about anything to me. So I didn't know what happened. I didn't know what you were supposed to do when you got married.

S: You just saw it as a way to get away from your father.

F: Get away from my father and be able to go out if I wanted to. I was lucky that it turned out so well. We had a little difficulty at the time because we were getting the backlash of the Depression then. My first husband was from a very good family and was a very good man. But I wanted to go on with this business of enjoying myself and there I had a handy escort all the time. (laughs)

S: Well, did you give up the idea then of going back to school when you got married, or was that still on your mind?

F: Well, I had my child [Ramon (Ray) V. Reyes] and in those days when you had a child, you stayed home. I never

gave up the idea of going back to work, but I was going to wait until my child was in school. I thought I could wait. I was not bored. I was pretty young so I could afford to wait.

When my boy was about two years old--my first husband, Ramon Reyes, was a newspaper artist, a commercial artist of the biggest newspaper there in Manila. Every payday I would go to his office or meet him some place and we went to a movie. There was no problem with babysitters--my mother was there, my sisters. One day I was sitting there, you know, and here came the editor of the Sunday magazine and he looked at me and said, "Aren't you the girl who writes?" I said, "I've written a few stories." He said, "How would you like to work here?" "Doing what?" I said. (laughs) I couldn't even type.

"Oh, we'll find something for you to do." So I started to work, and before you knew it I was running the entire feature section of the newspaper. I had health columns, I had fashion pages, I had features, church stories, poems and so on. I was doing all that for almost peanuts, you know.

S: Your husband didn't mind that you came to work there?

F: No, we were working in the same office and he didn't mind, because he always respected my writing because he never once felt that he had to interfere with what I wanted to do. As I said, this was what made him a very ideal husband also. He was very, very gentle; he was very kind; he liked my writing. He belonged to a family that enjoyed education and so forth. His father was in school in Madrid with our main national hero, Jose Rizal, so he came from a family that was really... And his uncle was the most famous folk lyricist in Tagalog in the Philippines. He liked the idea of my writing and when we were working together, we didn't have to worry about our son because my mother was there; my sisters were there and so on. We worked together and that was it. I never went back to teaching. (laughs)

S: It's amazing how these things came--one upon the other.

F: And all unplanned, you see. Nothing that I have done, it seems to me, was planned. Like, there I was, here came the war. During the war everything was very difficult. Towards the end of the war in 1944--my son was still a small boy when my husband was killed by one of the so-called guerrilla bandits. They pretend to be guerrillas but they were really doing it more to just intimidate people, to hold them up for money and so on. And they were the ones with guns.

My husband and I belonged to different guerilla units, but at that time nobody was supposed to talk about anything

because you could not trust anyone. And the Japanese were everywhere. This was in World War II. The month before, in March, my uncle, who was mayor, had been killed by these two boys who were pretending to be guerrillas. My husband found out who had killed my uncle, so they killed him. Right on my doorstep they shot him.

I brought him to the hospital. It took I don't know how long, because we had only one means of transportation--the municipal van. And everything was blacked out--no lights on the street or anything. We had the van--we went to the Philippine General Hospital. There was no anesthesia, no blood, no dextrose, nothing. I stood stroking his head and trying to encourage him through about five hours of surgery with no anesthesia. I was standing in this blood, and you are not even given the luxury of feeling anything else but just comforting this man, who was screaming because they had taken a piece of his intestine which had thirteen holes. Then he was still conscious when they brought him to the bed and I said, "It's over now. No vital organ was hurt and so forth. You're going to be okay now."

Well, he smiled at me, took my hand, kissed it and he was not conscious afterwards. I turned away when I felt there was no more hope. I didn't see him die. That is one of my greatest...I am really a coward that way. I had two premature babies seven years after the birth of my oldest son. I had one son who was born seven months, he was a premature baby. We thought he was normal. so we brought him home. Well, he died in less than a week at the house.

But for some reason I could always understand when my child is dying, and I would just turn away and my mother would get the child and I never saw my baby die. Then the following year, this was in September, 1941, I had another baby--a beautiful little girl and she was eight months--so only just a few weeks before her full term she was born prematurely also. But she looked so normal that, after a few days in the incubator, we took her home again. That night she started this breathing, so I just turned away and locked myself in my bedroom. I never saw my children die. And I didn't see their graves until my father died many, many years later because they were in the family plot.

But there are things that you cannot stand, but they never...they are as vivid to you as though it happened just a moment before because you just can't forget certain things.

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F: I was always in newspaper work even during the war. What happened was that when my first husband was killed--I had met by then two Harvard-educated Japanese who were very, very literate and they had read some of my writings. One of

them called me one day and said, "That piece of yours (in one of the literary publications) really just got me. The ending is superb." And that was before my husband was killed.

So when my husband was killed, he (the editor) and his assistant--this elderly, Harvard-educated man was the managing editor of a complex of magazines--weeklies, you know--that was taken over by the Japanese occupation army.

S: Were these men military, or where they still in a civilian capacity?

F: They were civilians. And they never talked politics to me or anything like that. I really looked on them as my friends. They came when my husband was in church before his funeral. They gave him a very deep bow and came to me and expressed their condolences. Then after a certain period one of them, the managing editor, called me and said that they wanted to put out a magazine for women. Would I like to be the editor of that?

Well, I hedged. I said, "Of course I need a job." But what I wanted to do first was consult with my guerrilla friends, because it could be a very delicate thing, you know. Well, one of my friends, who was a colonel in the guerrilla forces, was working as director of agriculture for the Japanese government. He said, "You know why I'm here--to be sure that the grain is given to our people. If you accept this job, you could prevent a real collaborator from using your magazine for propaganda."

It was like being a plant for the guerrillas there. I didn't want to take it. I would much rather work some place close to my home. But they convinced me that I would be needed. So I went to that magazine. I ran features, short stories, homemaking sections where you have ten ways of cooking the coconut, (laughs) how to unravel a piece of material so you can have thread, how to make such and such a thing into soap.

S: You were the Filipina Heloise.

F: Yes, yes, but I also was publishing--also using short stories, poems and so forth which could be used by my guerrilla friends in the hills--especially the ones that dramatized or were centered in difficulties of getting food or the lack of transportation, or things like that they could use for propaganda against the Japanese. I fought a number of times with what they called their business manager--who was actually the military commander of our complex there. I never heard anything from my two literary friends. They respected everything I did. They fought for some of these

things that came out, because I wanted to make sure that at least the readers knew how difficult things are.

My editorials made even some of my friends in the office really shiver. They'd say, "Aren't you afraid you're going to get killed? Why do you write things like 'when victory comes?' and 'just stay calm because victory's coming'." (laughs) I wrote those editorials without even thinking that I was writing for a Japanese-controlled paper because I was allowed so much leeway about the publishing part of it.

But, as I said, I had to fight so much with this...he couldn't bear the idea that I was the only woman there in this group of editors, and I was the only one who was saying things against certain policies that he wanted to initiate. The others would just look at me and make signs. But by then I was no longer afraid for my life--I didn't care. I got all kinds of...twice I got calls from my guerrilla friends saying, "You'd better take care. You're next on the list for Fort Santiago." Fort Santiago is where they really torture you and kill you and execute you--by the Japanese. One of my brothers was killed there. But anyway, I didn't care any more. I said, "Well, let them come." But they never came.

It was not an easy job, I tell you. I had to walk four hours each way from my parents' home to the office. At one time, I had to do this long journey wearing what they called oxford shoes, which were rationed to us by the Japanese. I developed this terrible pain--this wound in my heel and it just wouldn't heal because we had no medicine. I started using...I went back to using clogs, slippers and so on. You knew there was nothing you could do. You had to walk for hours and there were so many of us that most of the time we amused each other. But you got to work, and you wanted to stay sitting for a while. (laughs)

There were a few benefits to that because we got to eat. We had little rations of food. Most of us were eating just practically grass or bok choi or something like that or rice--just brown rice or dirty rice or something, but still we were eating that. But in this place, we were given a small portion--at least a little piece of chicken, a little rice and perhaps some vegetable. Just to show you what starvation really is--in normal times probably you would eat that and be satisfied, but a number of our people, especially the men, would walk around the block and line up again just to get that little ration. Probably the people doling out were very sympathetic, because you were supposed to only have one helping. But people were starving in more ways than one, so that the very sight of food makes you feel like you want to eat.

I've never eaten so much rice in my life. You see, when that happened, all of us grown-ups, who had set up our own homes, went back to the family home. At one time there were eighteen of us living there. We would cook a great bit of rice because that was being rationed, so we could get that. You had to have all kinds of ways of cooking things like--something like the Filipino spinach. You'd either cook it like...there was no such thing as cooking it like a stew because there were no tomatoes, so you try to put a little something to make it a little more tasty. You fed the children first because, if it's one thing you can't stand, it's having the children ask for more food when there's nothing. The grown-ups ate later. It was very difficult.

And when the fighting in Manila started, I had to go to the province with my son. We rode in a horse-drawn vehicle because that was the only thing we could get. We paid 800 pesos for that in occupation money, but at that time it was all the money we had--it was worth $400. We were being bombed all along the way--craters all over--so that a journey by car that would have taken thirty to forty minutes, took us from eight o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night. But at least there was food at the end. That was where we holed up for a little while with my in-laws, because they had gardens, truck gardens, animals and so on.

The worst really came when the Americans had already entered and the Japanese were retreating. There was almost nobody in town, because they had gone to the mountains. They were afraid of the confrontation between the guerrillas and the Japanese army. But I didn't want to leave where I was staying. There was a piano there and a bathroom. (laughs) There was a bathroom and windows and all. It was a beautiful little cottage. I just couldn't see myself sleeping, say on the floor, with about eight other people whom I hardly knew and no running water or anything like that. I just said, "I don't care." Because when they had bombing, before I went in the cottage when I was still living in Manila and Caloocan, I was always caught in the bathroom. Everybody would be screaming for me, you know, and finally I said, "Please leave me alone. If I get bombed here, I will die clean."

But, you see, you reach a point where it doesn't matter any more. All you want to do is stick to the same routine that gave you some self-respect. I couldn't do any of the things that some people would do in war. Betraying this and betraying that. We sold everything. We sold our carved dining sets, our carved beds and so on. The only thing we held onto was our German piano and some of the old worn-out beds. We just stayed there and tried to keep each other's morale up, because there was nothing to do. If you could eat, fine. We planted this wood potato. We planted them

on a fence. We knew when they were ready to eat, because somebody would steal them. (laughs)

So the war ended. We escaped the total annihilation. I lost one brother, one husband, then another brother was killed right after the liberation. Then I came back with my son to my hometown close to Manila. There again it was a very memorable trip because there was bombing all the way. I tried to get a ride with a military truck, and these two young Americans said, "Ma'am, you wouldn't like to ride in this truck." I said, "I have to see my sisters who are still in my hometown. My son and I have to be with them. My parents are safe in the provinces with my relatives." Some of my nieces and nephews and cousins were safe. They had left. But I still had two or three sisters, I think, and two brothers in the family home. I had to go back.

So I rode with them--it took a long time--but there was this bombing. I was sitting beside this driver and my son and the houseboy--the houseboy had to come with me--it wasn't--how should I say?--it wasn't decent or something for me to go by myself with my son.

S: Even after all you'd been through that still had to be?

F: They had to send a houseboy with us, so here we were. My son was sitting with me and the houseboy was on the inside, and suddenly I felt this soldier pull my hand and I got my boy out and we ran into this field. There was this bomb and it hit a horse-drawn vehicle and hit a little girl and her father. And I didn't realize until he had taken...this girl was fantastic. The father came out of the ditch all bloody and says, "My little daughter, my little girl." So we knew that this little girl was in the vehicle.

The soldiers could not believe--here was this girl--the father called to her and she said, "Oh yes, Father, here I am," in a normal voice, and yet she had the knee cap removed by that bomb. They said, "This is the bravest thing we have seen during this war." I found out later that we were the target because I was in a munitions truck. (laughs) I didn't know. I should have known that only munitions trucks would be on the streets at that time. So there I was. It took me three days to accomplish this. Through the help of this major and that captain and this serviceman, we got home. Three days.

Then our home became like a canteen for the soldiers. They would come in from the fighting and the city. They would be so dirty and they'd plop onto our sofas. Just to listen to the piano and get a cup of coffee. It made it very strange, you know. Before, you would never be seen with an American. It was against all sense of decency to be seen with an American, but this time they were just little, young

boys, and they were wonderful. Those post-liberation years--there was that euphoria that lasted a long time. I thought about that...

So when things got back to normal, I went back to editing the Senate President's [Manuel Roxas] magazines. When he was elected President, he got me into his press office. After six months, they opened this consulate general here. This Philippine consulate general for the Republic of the Philippines. So the president, after delegations had begged him to send me, allowed me to go, but he said for only two years.

Well, I came here. I worked as cultural and social attache; I did press releases; I spoke to every group you could think of; I joined every group you could think of. (laughs) I was secretary of this; I was secretary of that; I went to meetings, meetings, meetings, and I got married again. Here, after three years of widowhood, I wanted to get away because I didn't want to get married. You see, I was at three jobs in the Philippines: I was at the press office, I was doing for the evening news, and I was working for the Philippine War Relief, which was headquartered in Washington. So I was busy and I had already contracted for three books. One of them was to be...another book which was to be a collaboration between the head of the national museum [Dr. Bantug] and myself, an anecdotal biography of then President Quezon. [Manuel L. Quezon] So what happened? I came and I never left.

S: Did your son come with you when you supposedly came over for two years?

F: No, no, I was on my way to the United Nations, but my husband didn't like...so he married me so I wouldn't go to New York. I got married the first year I was here--within the year. Larry said, "I can't stand New York, and if you go, I'll never get you back." (laughs) I think he would have been right, because I would have wanted to go to all the plays and everything that's in New York. But anyway, I just stayed here, and after four years of working in the consulate there was a reorganization and I was going to be...there were job openings in Washington and New York, but I didn't want to work in the government anymore so I decided to work part-time at the Star-Bulletin.

I worked for them part-time for twelve years, and I might as well have worked for them full-time, but I don't like getting up early. I got an assignment every day, so I had to do something every day. You wouldn't believe everything I covered. From economics to geophysics, all kinds of things. I would say, "But what do I know about this?" And the editor would say, "If you don't understand

what's being said, the readers won't understand either, so just report what you understand." (laughs) So that made it simple.

The funny thing was--what I would do was set my own time for an interview--usually in the afternoon. So I would have an interview for about an hour--set it for about one-thirty--then after that I would go to a movie or the library and wait for my husband to bring me home. Then I would watch TV and after the program's over about midnight, I started to write. I would write my assignment until about two or three o'clock. Then I would leave it on my husband's place for breakfast, so that he would know to take it to the office. And this was very good, because I didn't have to wake up early.

But one time I could not finish something soon enough, so I had to catch a deadline. I was there about nine-thirty and I handed it to the city editor and he looked at me and said, "Oh, I'm so glad you came in. For the longest time we didn't know whether you were a man or a woman." (laughter) He had never heard the name Ligaya, you know.

S: They didn't know for sure if you were real.

F: Well, you see, I covered everything that they assigned me to, including politics. There was no TV in those days, so I covered political rallies, I covered economics, I interviewed everyone who came from the Philippines. I interviewed all the Philippine presidents including Marcos. So they didn't know until I went in there, because they didn't know the name Ligaya. Only a Filipino would know it, because it means happiness and there is no male equivalent for that, but it came out in all kinds of different spellings because either they could not read my handwriting or my typing or something. And I didn't care. I never corrected them. But that was one of the funniest comments that I got.

Then they would ask me to work full-time during somebody's vacation. I covered for this reporter and that reporter and when I realized that all I was interested in were the coffee breaks, I knew I couldn't work full-time. Also I liked to travel. My husband and I were assigned here, there and everywhere.

When we were assigned to the Big Island in the late 1950s, the Hilo Tribune Herald found out I was there, so they got me to work full-time. I worked there for a year, and thought I was going to die from pneumonia. (laughs) So I said, "That's enough of that."

Then he was sent to Guam. My husband was on loan to the Guam government for about two years and so what would happen to us, but the worst typhoon in Guam history--250 mile an

hour winds, you know. Our house--we were in government housing--beautiful house and it was just about two or three minutes from the hospital--the Guam Memorial Hospital--at that time a four million dollar hospital, and I did some volunteer work at that hospital, so I knew that I could cover the ground in about three minutes walking, strolling. But when that typhoon hit, we were in the room with the freezer and the water heater because that was the only place with three concrete walls. We were there from seven o'clock until around midnight. And then I heard all the glass falling. I looked up and we had no roof--nothing--and I said to my husband, "Get my raincoat." He walked through all the debris--he had boots on--because he was going back to his office, but I cried, "I don't want to be left." I was in a nightgown and a robe and I was wondering why I was getting wet, and here we had no roof. He said, "I can't find your robe. I can't find anything. The place is a mess, but don't move. I'm going to get you something to wear."

So he got a shirt--one of his shirts and a pair of pants. He tore up the shirt at the bottom and put it around me and he put me in the pants--my nightgown and all--and tied it with a piece of material and said, "Let's go." Our neighbor, in the meantime, had a bigger car than ours, so he was going to pick us up, but when we got out the door, we were swept across the lawn. I couldn't even turn my head. We were just swept by this wind. My feet--I had Japanese slippers on--I never even felt the ground. Suddenly my husband dropped me on the ground--in a ditch--because here was that car that had come for us and couldn't find us and had decided that we had already left. We were right in the path of that car. But that car couldn't even see us because the windshield was completely shattered. It took us about twenty or twenty-five minutes to get to the hospital and by then we found out that many of the walls were gone--the windows and everything--the two top floors had gone and the next morning when I saw my house, I almost fainted. Only two sides were standing up--one room and part of the kitchen. Even the bathroom was shoved in.

We lived in the hospital for over a month. Every morning I was like a coolie going to the house and trying to salvage everything. So like a uniform--a pair of shorts and a loose blouse. I would take the things in my closet and put these hangers wherever I could put a hanger. I would go to my neighbor's clothesline, because mine had been destroyed, and she would make room for my clothes. I wouldn't have gone about one or two yards when the rain would come again, and back I would bring my things. I would just go in this bedroom where there was like a little wood floor and I would sit there in the dark for about two hours--no lights, no radio, no nothing--I would sit there in the dark. And this

went on. Because he was the director of public works, we had our house repaired last. (laughs) He didn't want anyone to think that...

S: He took care of everybody else first.

F: We had water after three days. We didn't have electricity for a long time. Then there was no service station going--nothing--no markets, no stores. This was one of the most awesome things that frightened me--there was not a single leaf to be found on these trees along the highways. All the coconut trees were decapitated. Cement poles, flag poles, were cut in two.

S: Had you ever been through a typhoon in the Philippines?

F: Well, you see, in the Philippines every time that we had a typhoon, especially when I was growing up, it was fun. (laughs) You see, our big house we would rent to the school for domestic science classes, so we would go to our smaller house that I loved very much. It was surrounded by guava trees and so forth. And during the typhoons, we would either have all the relatives in our little house or go to another house, and it was like a picnic, you know. But never like this.

My family didn't realize what had happened until afterwards, because they thought I was used to typhoons. But nothing like this. Two hundred something mile winds--it was just too much. And no food. The Navy fed us--the Red Cross fed us and we stayed in one room of the hospital. They evacuated the patients to the naval hospital, which was a concrete building, that was not destroyed. We were there about one week or two weeks and they'd say, "You have to move to another room because this is going to be repaired." Every time they repaired a floor we were moved to the next floor. When we got to the third or fourth floor they said, "You can stay here. We're not going to repair this for a while." (laughs)

So there we were, in a place where there was this big, common bathroom without doors. If you were going to take a shower, you had to have your friend watch that nobody came in. We had the best view of the bay. (laughs)

S: But no privacy.

F: Well, as one of our guys said, "You can even hold hands with your neighbor in the toilet." But that wasn't the end of it. We had three major typhoons in eight months. And the only time...the one time I cried was after the third typhoon when I came home--I would go to the telephone company surrounded by all these old telephones that were disconnected. The time that I cried was when I came

home...we had piled our furniture in the center of the house and we came back and it was still there. That was when I cried, because I could not believe my good luck. (laughs)

S: After all you'd been through.

F: Well, as I say, it's like nobody would believe me if I wrote a book. They would think I was inventing.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

S: In our first interview we pretty much covered your background. This time I would like you to talk about the Marcos regime, the political scene in the Philippines, Mrs. Aquino, and I'd like to kind of stir your memory with a quote from an interview that you had with Imelda Marcos on September 12, 1966. I believe this was on their first state visit. Let me quote:

"To those who cannot be dissuaded from showing their admiration in tangible form, she has let it be known that she would be appreciative if their substantial gifts could be directed to any social welfare project or agency of their choice with all checks made out directly to the project or agency concerned."

Now this appeared in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin in 1966. Obviously, a lot of things have happened over the last twenty years. Did you believe at that point, when you wrote that, that she was really sincere, or was she from the beginning just putting on this outward appearance?

F: You did not get my quote from my first interview of her where she said that in this kind of position--they had just moved to Malacanang, February 10, 1966--he was inaugurated January 1, 1966 and they moved to Malacanang--she was talking about cultural things and in this story she said that in this position you can get jewelry as presents by the ganta. The ganta is about three liters. It's a measure of rice. "You can get it by the ganta," she said, "but I am not going to accept any presents, except probably flowers and produce." You know, perishables and so forth. This is what she said.

S: Did you interview her in the Philippines at that time?

F: Yes. She had just moved to Malacanang. She set the date because she had nothing in yet. And she did say that. I had it there and she was quoted in the Congressional Record of the Library of Congress because Senator Matsunaga submitted it as kind of an extension of the responsibilities or the kind of work the first lady can do.

But that thing stuck in my mind because not more than a year--within a year--I already heard reports about...

S: This first interview that you did in the Philippines appeared here in the Star-Bulletin?

F: Yes. The Star-Bulletin. I did it January 10, 1966. It probably took a little time to arrive here.

S: Well, this particular article was done when they made their first state visit and there was an article on Ferdinand Marcos--what a brilliant law student he was.

F: Yes, when he spoke to the United Nations and Congress and so on. Just like Mrs. Aquino has been invited to address Congress.

S: Do we have any idea when Mrs. Aquino's going to visit the United States now?

F: In September. It's very soon now. We cannot find a place to put the Marcoses. No place will accept them.

S: Getting back to the Marcoses. During the 1960s you were living here, but you were back and forth to the Philippines. You had relatives.

F: Almost every year. Sometimes twice a year I was there.

S: When you went back to the Philippines, did you see any tangible results of any progress that they had made?

F: No. What I saw was a kind of a degeneration, a feeling of insecurity every place. My sisters and I could only talk politics in our car. Even in our own living room--because you have so many friends going back and forth--they'd look around and say, "Let's not talk here." You have to go out. You don't know who will be listening. You don't know who is going to be spying on you.

They had established by then--by the mid-seventies or even earlier--what they called the barangay system. This is an old form of government in the Philippines. Before we had presidents, we had barangay captains. Head of the barangay. These are people who exercised the power to govern. To instruct. So they had this barangay system. Let's say they had our city all portioned out so that it would be a series of barangay. I would be there sometimes during what they called their elections. National elections. National referendums. If you did not vote, you could be thrown in jail.

One time during one of these so-called referendums which would give Marcos power for life--no limits to his

dictatorship--members of my family went to Baguio (that's the summer place), just so they would not vote. The people who remained voted against this thing and they gave them marks. Their votes were not counted. When the thing in the paper came out after the so-called elections, that if you did not vote you could have been thrown in jail or you would pay thirty pesos, one of my sisters said, "My God, why would I pay thirty pesos? They wouldn't count my vote anyway. It is a waste of time. I could very easily give them the thirty pesos and they could do as they wanted." But that was the way it was.

On one of my trips there, Mrs. Marcos, as governor general of Metro Manila, wanted to have the different cities of Metro Manila identified by color. You have to paint your fences green if you live in Caloocan, for instance. You have to paint the front of your house or your fence red if you live in Quezon City. Pasai was yellow and so forth. Here they were painting all these shacks, these ugly places.

Across from us was this old shop with the door already just hanging by one hinge, and here was our neighbor painting this thing. My sister, my niece and I were standing, the three of us, on our verandah appalled. "What's going on?" Here came this jeep with a loud speaker. The voice kept saying, "Paint the front of your houses or your fences green because a painted structure is stronger," and so on and so forth. I stayed there and stayed there and my two companions said a four letter word and then they went away. I said, "I'm staying to see if the voice is going to say that they'll pay for the paint." There was no such thing.

My brother-in-law at the time owned a market adjacent to where his office was. He was so angry when he found out that the whole front of the place had to be painted green. "Why?" he said. "Why can't we make our own decisions about how we want our place to look? The time will come when we will be kneeling down when she comes through." But this was the way it was. Those that were not painted--the shacks, the squatters' huts--they were hidden by long poles of bamboo fences that the government supplied, so that visitors could not see them as they went by. I mean why didn't they give the bamboo to build houses?

S: Was her idea behind this a beautification program, and she was going to determine what colors were best?

F: Yes, yes. You just dictated to these people what they should do. Now if they said, "Why don't you paint your fence?" Everybody had a fence because security was so tight. Why not allow them to choose the color? I might say, "I don't have the money to buy paint," but no, that was the rule--the law. Now tell me, is that improvement?

I got so angry because this was not the way I was raised. I grew up in the Philippines and this was not the way I was raised. We were allowed to have our own gardens, flowers and so forth. If we wanted fences, we built them. What ever color we wanted, we painted them. We didn't want the government to tell us they're going to be green, red, yellow. Why should they do that? Even in a little matter, you cannot make a decision.

S: I have read that a lot of the support that the Marcoses get now is from his province of Ilocos Norte. Did they do anything for the people in this particular province? Was this their "show and tell?"

F: I have seen this on TV. The roads are very nice leading to their palace there, which is as large or even larger than their palace in Manila. They have that big statue there to remind them who the boss is all the time, and right next to that is a golf course. A man was interviewed and he said, "You see this golf course? They took my land to build it and how often do they use it?" Especially after he got sick. And yet it was there and they made it very, very nice within that surrounding area.

The same thing they have done--I have visited three of their palaces--the one in Malacanang, which they had barricaded, and I went to Canlubang, which is about two hours by car south of Manila. This winding road to go through rice fields and plantations and then, when you reach some of these nice-looking houses, you know that these are some of the homes of the cronies. Then you go up and you have this big, big golf course with the huge clubhouse. Then you go to this place where you have two mansions separated by a very ornate walkway or verandah. And it's divided into sections.

One section is for guests; six fancy bedrooms. That place is furnished with Philippine furniture. We didn't see the other section, but we were told that that didn't have any Philippine furniture. All the furnishings came from Europe. The caretaker said, "There is a lot of gold and marble and so on and, of course, a very fancy bed." Then I went to this other place, and you know when you are getting really distant from the palace, because potholes are all over the place.

Then when you go to this place, which is about forty-five minutes from Manila, they have a place that is what they call the cubeta village, which is a concession of outdoor outhouses. Small, prehistoric kinds of toilets for use by people in shanties. You have to buy them from a crony of the Marcoses. Then you go up. We came to this Taal Lake, which is famous because it's a lake in the crater of this volcano. Well, we wanted to see this Sky Palace of Imelda

Marcos, which she was building for President Reagan in 1983 when he was supposed to pay a visit to the Philippines. But, of course, they stopped construction because of the assassination of Benigno Aquino.

And you should have seen the roads. I looked and I said, "We cannot get over there. It's a mountain." But before we knew it, we were there. The roads were beautiful. We got there. The view was unbelievable. It was fantastic. We were surrounded by the most gorgeous mountains. It was on the same level as the volcano. But, of course, distant. There was a caretaker. You should have seen the sign before we entered this place. It said, "Medical Institute for the Armed Forces." The caretaker, who had been waiting for three years to get paid, said, "That's all camouflage. That's nothing. This is really a palace. This is supposed to be the Sky Palace." And he brought us up. He showed us the kitchen. The kitchen was bigger than this living room, I think. Then we go farther in and there is the room for President Marcos. This room--you think it's modest until you see there's an elevator shaft there and there is going to be another room which will lead to a hospital area. Then you go forward and there is a big room which is going to be Imelda Marcos' room and this room was to be--according to this caretaker who was the foreman--the ceiling was going to be all mirrors and adjoining that would have been the Reagan suite.

You should have seen the Reagan suite. It was to have been picture windows all around, because the view is fantastic. This huge. We went to the bathroom. The bathroom was the size of a bedroom almost. It had about three wash basins, which were going to be covered with imported marble. The holes were there already. Then there were going to be these bathing facilities and so forth. And everything would be picture windows.

S: They had the foundation in and they had the walls. Did they have the electrical work done already?

F: Yes, and they had the water.

S: But they didn't have the final fittings or the furnishings? Would you say it was seventy-five percent completed?

F: Yes, because the roof was there. The rooms were divided already. The stairs were spiral stairs leading to a disco on top.

S: Of course, they'd have to have a disco.

F: Yes, and they had this between floors--it was three floors leading to the disco--you had these winding staircases

one leading to the disco from the second floor, and they were supposed to put various huge trees without any branches, which would have hanging orchids all over. The one wall was to be covered with orchids.

You had a bedroom for each of the children. The married children, and an extra bedroom for the nursemaids and everything. And that had already cost the Philippine government fifty-seven million pesos. Fifty-seven million pesos! Can you imagine bringing power lines and water lines up those mountains?

S: Was there just one man there at this point? The caretaker?

F: There were other people there. You know what they were doing? How they were supporting themselves? You see, this was not very well known. We found out because my sister knew someone who knew someone and so forth. She arranged for us to meet there. This man and his family had been subsisting--they had under this thing, which probably would have been a garage or something, he had set up kind of a snack store or something where you could have a fresh young coconut. You could have some little items.

S: A little concession?

F: Yes, and that's what they had been living on.

S: But who would patronize them? Just the people who found out and came to look at this? There were no towns near this?

F: There had been no publicity about this. We went there on April 14 [1986]. On the thirteenth, which was supposed to be National Heroes Day because of Bataan and Corregidor, the Defense Minister and his officers...(interrupted by phone call)

But since fifty-seven million pesos have already gone into this, they probably will continue and turn this into a luxury motel. Even if you charge one thousand pesos a room (that's only fifty dollars), at least it will pay in part for what has been spent. There is a pool there with an adjoining--I won't call it a lounge--because that's where you can eat or drink or snack while you are swimming. Then you go back to the pool. It was going to be the most beautiful of all the palaces. Of course, nobody had given it very much publicity because certainly the Marcoses will not admit. But we saw it. It is unbelievable. When you see these garbage dump villages--people living worse than animals--and see this kind of money spent on nothing. Like all these different palaces. She has one on Makiling Mountain and how often does she visit there? She doesn't use them all year.

She doesn't use them on weekends. She's always travelling. And he cannot go anywhere. He's too sick.

S: But at the beginning, the United States was taken in by the Marcoses. Were the Filipino people?

F: He was a very smart man. He was a smart man and I, for one, was willing to give him a chance to be a great president. I had known him since practically his student days, because at one time according to a friend of ours--I didn't really pay much attention to him--he had ambitions of becoming a writer. He spoke in this high-flung language, but I think there was this over-riding greed because why else would he do this kind of thing? You cannot, even if you live three or four lifetimes, use up all that they have accumulated. Now look at those palaces. Who stays in them? Caretakers. They bring George Hamilton, Christina Ford, and so forth over there, but how often do they come? Only somebody with a big problem would have a ten million dollar wedding for her daughter. I tell you, this is the kind of thing that really gets you. You see all this ugliness.

Like I was telling you about this little town I was born in. Everybody was a cousin. You knew everyone. We had fish ponds on one side and we had rice fields on the other. A very big area--in between you had these old homes. Gracious homes, not fancy, very few went in for that--except one or two--and now when I came back, it was like a slum. I couldn't believe that I was already home. Where were all these gracious homes I had remembered on Main Street? Where were all these beautiful houses on the side streets that led to the municipal building? They were all covered by signs of shops. Would you believe a lumber yard right on Main Street? I said, "What happened?" I thought I would scream.

And here was this little road, just a little wider than ours, that used to lead to the market. I remember that market. I used to go with my mother to the market because she was the type who went to market every day. I couldn't even find it because of all the ugly shops in front, and I didn't believe I could stand the smell. That road ended on railroad tracks and became another road. It became the terminus for all the jitneys of that area. So there you are. How do you get through to get back and forth? Then you go to another area which is a nice road now. We use it all the time except we pass all these squatters' villages; all these smoking dumps with houses. Thousands of people living there and you can't forget the fact that this road was built by condemning the houses of your own relatives.

We had a childhood friend, a doctor who was chief of staff at our hospital in Caloocan. He was widowed. I had known his parents and I had known him, and all that time he had had this house. The time I made my last visit it was an

old house, but very nice. He had three children and they decided they were going to pass the road through that, so they condemned it. Do you know how much they paid for that? What it cost about fifty or seventy years ago. That was the way they did business.

So my poor doctor friend had a nervous breakdown. He was at the time probably working three jobs to send his children to college, and then he was counting on that house for them. A big property you know. How you can endure all that? I was there over a month and I don't think I left the house except for church, more than about five or six times.

One of those times was to go to Malacanang; another time to go to San Pablo the home of Corky's [Trinidad] wife's family; another time to go to a district called Baclaran, which is right in the heart of that area--the Roxas Boulevard area ended in that place where there is a pilgrimmage spot for Our Lady of Perpetual Help, just to buy house dresses. Another time I had to go to Malacanang to meet with Cory Aquino.

S: When you were living over here, as we said earlier, you used to go back and forth quite frequently. Then you reached a point where you did not return for a number of years.

F: Nine years.

S: What brought about the decision not to return? Was it martial law or what?

F: A combination of a number of factors. My oldest sister had died in 1977. I couldn't face the fact of going there without her. I had always lived in her house. Then my husband died in 1979 and I couldn't travel, because I used to travel with him or he took care of things over here while I was away. In 1981 my oldest brother died. So it was just one thing after the other. I was sick a number of times. Then I started becoming very, very vehement about the Marcoses. I thought, "All right, I'm very small potato," but I know them too well. They have probably read all my writings against them and I wouldn't put it past them to at least make me uncomfortable. Because I just couldn't stand any more that atmosphere of repression that I remembered from the times I had gone there.

I waited and the only reason that I came back this time--what really made it almost imperative for me to go was my involvement in the Cory Aquino campaign, and also my feeling that I had to see my relatives. I had to see how they had fared, what they had done, how these changes have affected them. I was very reassured by what I have seen.

They really learned to take care of themselves. A niece of mine, who was probably rather spoiled, married very early. She qualified for a job, but there was no job. Her husband had only intermittent jobs, so she learned to make sausages, bacon. She learned to cure ham, and she rationed all this to our big family and friends and she made a living.

Another niece--her father had these fish ponds--so they concentrated on promoting the production of those fish ponds. You buy from them if you need this or need that. Another had a farm and she had a piggery and poultry and so on. You would see money changing hands within the family all the time because they were buying from each other. So I felt very, very happy about this.

My younger sister, who was secretary to the president of Shell in the Philippines, took early retirement because she just couldn't stand anymore. All the traffic, all the different changes. She took part in all the rallies. She and her husband became very militant opposition people. During the revolution, my sister and her husband--her husband had worked for this independent vote counting group--Namfrel --when they heard on radio Veritas that Enrile and Ramos had already defected and Cardinal Sin would like to have the civilian population protected--they have four children--they took two children each and they said, "If we don't see each other on the street, we'll see each other in the house." They didn't see each other until the following day. They just stayed there all night. I found all that and I felt this is just wonderful. This is glorious to come back and find all these changes.

S: Yes, these people have survived all this.

F: They survived and they have not lost their integrity or anything. They just decided like my brother-in-law, who incidentally just passed away, he was a man about eighty years old who had lived a very quiet life. A self-made millionaire actually. What he had done--he absolutely refused to read any more Marcos papers. And here he was before. His morning started; he would play golf and when he came back, he had again a number of papers. He said, "I am reading again because now we have a free press." This was a man who was in politics at the time and he would not take even a campaign contribution. He would sell a piece of land and he would say, "This is what I am going to spend for my campaign. Win or lose, this is all I am going to spend." When he got defeated, he just forgot about it. All right, that land was gone so that's it.

S: We hear so frequently that political "contributions," bribery, whatever they're called, are an integral part of Filipino life, that they've been that way for so many years,

it's accepted. Do you remember when you were growing up that this was true? We've been told that from the little local police chief on up this is just the way the Philippines is.

F: My father was in the council as far as I can remember when I was growing up and I never heard him accept anything. I know that we had free passes to two movie houses. (laughs) He never paid the policeman because they always sent policemen to ask him to meetings. But I never heard him accept anything. We found out that when he died in the late 1950s we could have been millionaires, if he had not been in politics. What he had done was to sell our rice lands to finance our education, to finance a last fling in the political office. He lost and this land that he had sold for what we would call pennies right now had become...

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

S: ...shop areas and this was near Manila.

F: Because the population had just zoomed. Our town is north of Manila and Quezon City, which is a new city actually compared to our town, was part of our province before. They took two-thirds of our area for Quezon City. So you can imagine! We would have been millionaires now because they have all kinds of things standing on that land, and we didn't find this out until he died and we saw the papers. But we never asked any questions. We never interfered. But we never heard of anyone giving him anything.

So these campaign contributions, bribery, frauds and so on are a comparatively new thing in the Philippines. It probably started after World War II because by then there had already been a breakdown of morality because of the difficulties. Some people had turned collaborators to survive. Others survived just through sheer will to survive. But all these irregularities stem from all those because, as I said, I have known a beautiful period of innocence in the Philippines and I could not somehow get used to this idea that you are supposed to do this now. When I see my place there and there is no money for the hospitals, but they have cockpits and everything, I just don't understand.

S: You left the Philippines shortly after World War II, so this breakdown in morality that you refer to occurred after you left, but as you went back and forth you could observe this gradual decline.

F: It was not too apparent. I found out most of this from the press because we had a very free press then. Almost licentious, where you pay delegates for the constitutional convention and not only pay them money, but put them in hotels and furnish them with women and there you are. You

have them beholden to you. This was happening in the time of Marcos. But certainly before this, I didn't know that this was happening. And I felt pretty close to the scene myself because I was in newspaper work. When things got very, very bad in the 1960s, I thought, "My gosh, what they need is probably a revolution." So what did they get? Martial law. And we thought, well, perhaps martial law would hold it for a while. It made it worse because the people from the top...

One Annapolis graduate friend of mine, who is dead now, even said--before they were not supposed to use official public vehicles for their families. But he said, "We shall stop doing this when the top people stop doing that, because they can afford to do it more than we can. We have our families take the busses, but if you take them on outings, you have to have cars." And since many of them are still working, even if they are on outings, because family life is very close over there, which probably accounts for the survival of many of our people. There is this feeling of caring always. You always take care of people who need help. You don't have to question the relationship. I haven't heard of anyone putting his mother or his grandmother or an aunt in a retirement home because I don't think there's a retirement home in the Philippines.

When I was growing up, we always had one relative in our bedroom whose name we probably didn't even know, but we had to bring food to her, she was bedridden, and when she died, we buried her. I was growing up. I didn't know who they were or what the relationship was, but that was the way it's always been. And I find out that this could be the very strong reason why we could have a very good revolution in the Philippines.

As Cory Aquino's sister-in-law said--after the death of her brother--she was here and she said, "I didn't realize just what the funeral of my brother had really done for the Philippines. All the goodness in the Filipino character came out." Everybody was helping one another. If you had a bar of chocolate, you took a little piece and passed it on so that ten or twelve people could have a piece of chocolate. If you had a cup of coffee, you took a sip and passed it on and that was the same thing that happened during the revolution.

Three of our people were there for the election and the revolution, and they testified to the fact that there was so much fraud and during the revolution they said, "How about food?" "Oh, my gosh," they said, "there was so much food." Somebody said, "And even a portable toilet." (laughs) Just like a celebration. There was this feeling, "We are brothers." This is something that was probably dimmed during the Marcos years except that during the Marcos years there

was still probably this feeling of kinship with those who believed as you did, but you distrusted some who were benefitting from the regime.

S: When you were back on this last visit, did you find that people had either overlooked or had forgiven President Reagan's insinuation that there was fraud on both sides of this election? Was this brought up at all? Will they ever forgive him for that boner?

F: I doubt it very much. Both sides, the Marcos side and the Aquino side, are a little bitter about President Reagan. The Marcos people said that the U. S. kidnapped their president. Kidnapped the president with two plane loads of loot! (laughs) And the Aquino people cannot understand how Reagan can be so supportive of Marcos after all that has come out, and how he could completely disregard the new government after what has been called the most incredible demonstration of democracy at least this year, if not in the history of the world.

S: Well, do you think they believe the story that he pretended support of Marcos simply to get him out and avoid bloodshed?

F: Nobody believes that.

S: You think it could have been accomplished without blood shed?

F: Well, the thing is that Marcos left the Philippines, but he wanted bloodshed. He wanted Malacanang bombed. Never mind the civilians. Some of the officers who had been ordered to bomb said, "How about the civilians?" "Never mind. Just bomb."

S: That's what I mean. Don't you think that the fact that President Reagan got him out of there before he could resort to bloodshed counts for something?

F: Well, they felt that President Reagan could have brought him out without giving him certain benefits just to get him out of there because of the new government. You will notice that all of Reagan's people--[Paul] Laxalt, [Richard] Lugar, everybody else--knew that Marcos had to be whisked away if the new government had to have a chance. And he had to be whisked away no matter in what manner, and they felt they did not want to say outright that you have to get him out of here because he is a troublemaker or something. They believe in the Philippines that Marcos must have a hold on Reagan. They keep wondering whether Marcos had made substantial or undeclared contributions to Reagan. Why would he wait two months before even calling President Aquino? These people were saying, "Every athlete who wins a

fight, a game, he calls. He can telephone to the moon and so on. Why can't he telephone Cory Aquino after a very marvelous demonstration of leadership?" This they could not understand. President Aquino, herself, has said nothing, absolutely nothing about this to indicate that she was hurt by this, but I'm sure that she must have been.

S: Don't you think that now in the past couple of months since Secretary of State Shultz is putting in appearances that possibly Reagan is trying to mend fences or make amends because Shultz is now stressing United States investment in the Philippines and this type of thing.

F: I feel that this is completely Shultz' idea because when he met with Salvador Laurell in Indonesia he was angry when Laurell said, "One hundred twenty-five million is not enough." And so I think that he said, "We cannot feed all the people in the world." Then he met Corazon Aquino and was so impressed by her--her sincerity, her simplicity, her statesmanship--that he promised he was going to help her raise two billion dollars in aid and investments. So I don't think that that was on orders from Reagan, because I don't think Reagan was concerned with the Philippines at the time.

This is why even John Chancellor had made the commentary that here he (Reagan) was lobbying so hard for aid to the contras in Nicaragua, and here he hasn't said a thing about aid to the Philippines which is--because the contras aid will probably prolong communisn in Nicaragua, but the aid to the Philippines is to stop communism from growing, and yet he wouldn't say anything about that. Now what does that say? This is the feeling in the Philippines that the common people are saying openly and the officials are keeping silent about because they are trying so hard to really maintain a certain very dignified approach to this because we are not beggars and I don't think they want to look like they're beggars because Cory Aquino kept saying, "It's wonderful to get foreign aid, but we have to help ourselves first." By this helping of ourselves she means really actual sacrifices.

When we went to see her she pointed to the people around her and said, "Look at them. They're all volunteers. We don't have money to pay them."

S: What chance do you think she has of dealing with the communists? How do you think she's going to handle that?

F: Well, the fact that she has been able to negotiate a cease fire agreement with them is a very good indication. She had repeatedly promised that she was going to free all the prisoners including the founders of the communist party there. Now the thing is this--she has said this--that what is needed is not really--you just cannot say, "Stop fighting," you have to have land reform. How can a barrio

that's supporting the communists stop depending on them if they have no money to plant food of their own or if they don't have jobs? It's a very difficult situation, and the only thing that is helping her is that she has not indulged in any excesses of any kind. She has set an example for extreme self-sacrifice because she was right when she said, "When the Philippines got their freedom, I lost mine." She said, "You hear of people who work from nine to five; I work from five to nine." The people around her who are there at eight o'clock or so find her already there.

S: Has she expressed an opinion as to what she would like to see done to Marcos at this point?

F: She keeps hedging because she says, "Of course we cannot deny him as a Filipino his right to come home, but not at this time because the passions are very high. The country is in a terrible mess so far." Short of saying that he is going to make it worse because he's a troublemaker, she indicates that she would not like to have him back.

S: But she would like to see him out of the United States?

F: Well, the thing is this. The reason that she--she has been assured that whether he stays in the United States or not, he can be tried in U. S. courts and Philippine courts. So she is for allowing him to leave the United States. Before, it seemed imperative that he stayed here to answer all these charges. But now I think he has proven a very great embarrassment to the U. S. government. No place will accept him. What can you do? There is absolutely no place that he can go. Even that little island off New Zealand where $500 million would develop that island into---they turned him down. And here these people over here--and don't say Ilocanos--because we have thousands of Ilocanos who are against him--these are fanatics who are making use of him. This is why I was telling the Consul General here, "Perhaps we should start warning the media of the Marcoses. Not to quote all his lies, not to quote all his accusations of this, that and the other, because there are people who believe that if you're in the forefront of the news--good or bad--you are a superstar, and these people could be the ones who are clinging to him because he's the only one they can cling to. They have nobody to attach themselves to. Many of them don't even know why they are clinging to him. They just happen to come from his area. But the enlightened ones...

S: Well, that was the feeling that I got. That it was the strong brotherhood of the provinces.

F: It was the feeling of regionalism. In the first place, in the Philippines, for instance, you don't turn on a relative because he was accused of this, that or the other. You always make excuses for him. I don't know what excuse

you can find for Marcos, (laughs) but evidently they have found a number of excuses for him; otherwise why are they attaching themselves to him?

It's an Oriental trait. Family is very important. And by family you just don't mean the immediate family. You mean anyone to the nth degree of cousinhood or something. In the Philippines, for instance, over here you would probably call someone a second cousin, but they always address you as "Auntie" or something. Let's say that somebody no matter how young--the separation of the generations is very strongly observed. You should see the children of my relatives when they come in the house. They kiss the hands of all the older people because that was the way we were raised--that you kiss the hands of your parents, your aunts and your uncles, so you'll be blessed. And they still do it. I usually hug them when they get to me, (laughs) because I just don't feel like having my hand kissed.

S: Do you think Mrs. Aquino holds out any hope at this point for retrieving any of the property or money that the Marcoses made off with?

F: Well, I really don't know because it's a very complicated thing because they used so many dummies--dummies who could, if they were really opportunistic enough, claim this property for themselves and become millionaires.

S: If they were smart dummies!

F: Yes. Well, they did not choose dummies for dummies. (laughs) The feeling in the Philippines is that it will take a long time. So the idea there is to just generate enough income for land reform, for production, because the poverty is just unbelievable.

S: How active a role is the Catholic Church taking now?

F: Cory Aquino had said that if humanitarian aid is sent to the Philippines, she would prefer to have it sent to the Church and that seems to be what's happening. Like in this Negros food and freedom fund, we send everything to Bishop [Antonio Y.] Fortich in Negros. In other places you have certain bishops who receive all this aid because the government wants to stay away from all that. They feel that this is being handled very adequately through the Church and they want to keep it that way. Cardinal Sin and the bishops are playing a very active role in that.

Did you see in the People Column yesterday about the two officials who went for conferences and returned the money that they did not spend and the treasury couldn't believe it? The labor secretary turned in $1,000 dollars and the legal counsel turned in $600 and the treasury people could not

believe this, because during the Marcos regime all they got were receipts. I mean, this is the will that is there. If this feeling persists, no matter how desperate people are, there is still a certain hope. Because people are caring for you. They aren't taking advantage of you. So as I said, when we went to see Cory Aquino, I felt over-dressed. (laughs)

I was wearing pearls and a dress that I thought was pretty good. My other friend was very well dressed herself and here was Cory Aquino with her face perspiring, no makeup, no lipstick, and a cotton shirtwaist dress and just stud earrings. She was more concerned about the artesian wells. She said, "We have to give this to the private sector. There is no money from the government." So many of our people depend on rain water and if there's no rain, there's no water. And many of them don't have clean containers. Usually you depend on the gutters, and what kind of gutters do you get in squatters' areas? And you cannot put just anything there--a basin outside--with all the splashed dirt coming in. So there you are.

They say in this Negros place a hundred children a month die from malnutrition. This is really terrible for a country so rich. We have all kinds of metals, we have fertile lands, we have...so why? It's because they had about thirty families controlling the whole country. Many of these are Marcos people or Imelda's relatives. And they are amassing money that they could never use.

You probably saw on 20/20 when they were going to have this international film festival, they were rushing it so that the cement of one wall had not yet hardened, and it fell killing about thirty people. They could not get them out of there. And how much did they give the relatives? Two thousand pesos. A hundred dollars as compensation. Two thousand pesos. When Marcos left, there was $153 in the treasury. He probably forgot. Customs said that when the boxes of pesos were opened, some of the pesos were not even cut.

S: Yes, I had read that they were newly printed.

F: One customs official said, "Why didn't they bring the printing press?" And the printing presses that they found there were for counterfeit money, which they used to buy votes for the election. What kind of animals are these?

My brother-in-law said that when he was watching during the election, they were supposed to be distributing rice and they called it belated Christmas presents. There was this line of people waiting for rice. Well, when the TV cameras left, so did the rice truck. The people said, "Well, no

rice." This is unbelievable. If it had not been told to me by people who are close to me and who were there, I would say this is fantasy. It's true.

S: Now that you've been back this year--in spite of all the poverty, at least you've seen the spirit and the hope evidenced--so do you plan on going back within the next year or are you just going to keep working from here?

F: I plan on going back around Christmas time because now that I've broken the phobia of not going there, I like being with my relatives and they made me promise to come when it's cooler.

S: Yes, you had said it was so hot you were really exhausted.

F: It was so hot it was absolutely unbearable. It was so hot. The humidity was just about as high as the temperature and people right and left were getting sick. But I hope I can go back and find out if there have been any changes.

S: Well, I'm sure that going back this time--along with the intense heat and humidity--was a very emotional time for you.

F: What really appalled me was the way the people had been living, the way the Metro Manila area had gotten. You saw lines and lines of people at the U. S. Embassy--people trying to get out of the country because there are no jobs. You saw people at the recruiting center for Saudi Arabia. And you see these people who are supposed to be Marcos supporters. They go there because they have to earn money. They are paid from fifty pesos to one thousand. Why not? Where else can they make that kind of money? As this woman vendor was telling my sister, "All I have to do is sit down and they give me fifty pesos. And they pay you to stand up and raise your hand in a V-sign. They feed you. Furnish you with transportation."

So what can you do. The Filipinos are a very adaptable kind of people. They will adapt to any situation. You were there when Father John [Dougherty] said that they plan their demonstration on Sunday afternoon at Luneta Park because that's when families go there for picnics. So they counted them in as Marcos supporters. (laughs) They didn't even know they were being counted in. This is the way they operate. Even when I was there, you see, they cover on TV about confrontations and so on. Throwing of bottles between the police and so on. That was happening when I was there almost every Sunday. These people paraded and they are paid goons, goons who really try to provoke the police, and the police don't want to be provoked because this would sort of

nullify this idealistic revolution of non-violence and so forth. But what can you do when you are being hit? You try to strike back. It's a very terrible situation.

I hope it gets better. I am very, very encouraged by the attitude of the people working in the government. They know the great difficulties they are facing and the press, because for the longest time it was suppressed, now makes so much of all these disagreements. What can you do?

S: But all of this is long-range. It's going to take her so long.

F: As one cabinet officer said to Shultz,"You are hearing the sounds of democracy." This didn't happen before. Marcos told you, "Do this!" and you had to do it or else. I hope and pray that we can really do something. I don't know how, but the group here is active. When I go back, I would like to see if something has been done. One thing I don't believe I will stop seeing for a while is the garbage dump--the squatter's area. I just can't get used to it. I just felt like, "How can anybody live in this?" Some of the trash is still being burned in the background, and yet 8,000 people live there.

S: I've never been there, but I get the feeling from what you've said that Metro Manila seems to be one large slum.

F: There are nice areas and a number of them in certain places--you see, this is the garbage dump area I was telling you about. [George Chaplin's series]

S: This is such a good series.

F: I want to take credit for putting that together. When I saw the series, I said, "I just have to have that."

S: I'm glad to see that you are optimistic, not overly optimistic, but encouraged.

F: I've lived too long to be overly optimistic. I pray a lot. I have a great deal of hope, but I am realistic. Having been in the newspaper business for much of my adult life, you just can't really be less than objective. You have to see, no matter how it hurts, just what is there to see and accept it. Report it. And while you can editorialize in your mind, you cannot distort the truth without sacrificing certain professional integrity. You just feel that you have to accept things. It will take a long time to bring back the things that I used to know. It was ravaged almost beyond belief. At least some portions that I had seen.

Other places are still beautiful. There are developments and homes. But not for the poor. Some wealthy people just bought the rights from the squatters and used them to rent out to other people. Rental income. So instead of, let's say, having a family benefit because of this low housing--adequate housing--well, you probably get about twenty pesos more, so that you can buy some rice and stay under a tree or something like that. So as I say, you come to some of these very nice places. But even some of the shops are so awful....

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 2

SUBJECT INDEX

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Watumull Foundation Oral History Project began in June of 1971. During the following seventeen months eighty-eight people were taped. These tapes were transcribed but had not been put in final form when the project was suspended at the end of 1972.

In 1979 the project was reactivated and the long process of proofing, final typing and binding began. On the fortieth anniversary of the Watumull Foundation in 1982 the completed histories were delivered to the three repositories.

As the value of these interviews was realized, it was decided to add to the collection. In November of 1985 Alice Sinesky was engaged to interview and edit thirty-three histories that have been recorded to mark the forty-fifth anniversary of the Foundation.

The subjects for the interviews are chosen from all walks of life and are people who are part of and have contributed to the history of Hawaii.

The final transcripts, on acid-free Permalife bond paper and individually Velo-bound, are deposited and are available to scholars and historians at the Hawaii State Archives, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii and the Cooke Library at Punahou School. The tapes are sealed and are not available.

August 1987